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ABSTRACT

In 1984 the General Assembly of South Carolina passed the Education Improvement Act of 1984--the "New Approach", a comprehensive educational reform measure. The following action initiatives were mandated: (1) increase academic standards; (2) strengthen student discipline and attendance in the schools; (3) provide more effective use of classroom time; (4) provide programs of excellence for talented students; (5) provide more relevant vocational training programs; (6) provide programs of excellence for handicapped students; (7) require an exit exam for graduation; (8) enactment of a promotion policy; (9) improve the basic skills in all grades; (10) increase the number of highly qualified persons going into teacher profession; (11) raise teacher salaries in order to attract and hold qualified persons in teaching; (12) improve preservice and inservice teacher training; (13) maximize the utilization of teaching time and talent; (14) recruit the most able candidates to become principals and administrators; (15) improve the training and evaluation of prospective and current school administrators; (16) evaluate and reward schools and school districts based on measurable performance and progress; (17) focus the planning of schools and school districts on instructional improvement, and effective use of resources; (18) monitor annually the implementation of the Educational Improvement Act; (19) strengthen the involvement of parents in their children's education; (20) increase the participation of business and industry in the public schools; (21) broaden community involvement in the public schools; and (22) perform pressing repairs, renovations and construction on school buildings.

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The New Approach To Educational & Economic Excellence In South Carolina

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On Jan. 11, 1984, in my State of the State address, I asked the General Assembly — and all South Carolinians — to decide our course for the exciting and challenging years ahead. Their response was support and passage of the Education Improvement Act of 1984 — the “New Approach” — an educational reform plan that makes our people and their betterment the top priority in South Carolina.

The New Approach is the single most comprehensive educational reform measure in the history of our state. And, I am proud to say, it has also been judged as the “most comprehensive single piece of (education) legislation” in the nation by a consultant for the Education Commission of the States.

The New Approach is our statement to the rest of the nation and the world. We’re stating that we share a common faith in our children; that we have confidence in our potential and what we can accomplish, and that we are willing to invest the commitment, the support and the work necessary to change our great expectations into reality.

It is also a statement of pride — an expression of determination that mediocrity will never again be tolerated. We will not be satisfied until we see progress in every county, every school district, every school, every classroom and every child in this state.

The New Approach also represents the hard work of thousands of people during the 12-month period it took to formulate this plan and to gain its approval by the General Assembly.

The New Approach represents a symbol of progress for South Carolina. It marks a milestone in our history. Now, we face the challenge of turning it into a vehicle of progress for generations to come.



I ask all South Carolinians to join me in making this challenge a reality of our future.

Richard W. Riley
Governor



One of the measuring sticks of any program of educational excellence is whether it truly puts students to the test. The New Approach does. By toughening graduation standards and reaffirming the role of academics in our schools, this program pushes the student toward excellence. By increasing the academic demands on students at all levels, it succeeds not only in enhancing the learning experience, but also in ensuring that our young people are equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

At the same time, however, the New Approach recognizes the important and direct relationship between the effectiveness of the classroom experience and the attitudes of the student toward learning. It provides for clearly defined rules of discipline; tough but fair rules that are equitably and consistently enforced.

By strengthening attendance policies and underscoring the importance of in-school learning time, the New Approach takes very definite steps toward curbing the kind of activity that impedes a school's efficiency and affects the students' academic progress.



ACTION INITIATIVE ONE:

*To Raise Student Performance
By Increasing Academic Standards At All Grades*

A. Increase Academic Standards

1. In order to earn a high school diploma, students will be required to complete 20 units — two additional units, one each in science and math.
2. Students in grades 9 through 12 must pass four courses and maintain an overall passing average in the previous semester to participate in interscholastic activities.
3. All secondary schools, excluding vocational and secondary schools for the handicapped, must offer clearly defined college preparatory programs to their students.
4. The State Department of Education will emphasize the importance of "higher-order" problem-solving skills in curricula, to shift away from short-term memorization and toward a fuller understanding of processes and concepts.
5. Black History must be a part of school curriculum by the 1989-1990 academic year.

B. Strengthen Student Discipline and Attendance in the Schools

1. The State Board of Education will establish a minimum code of conduct and enforcement policies. Districts may impose additional standards and policies.
2. The State Board will establish minimum guidelines for Scholastic Standards of Achievement for public school students. Local districts may impose stronger rules and additional penalties.
3. Students cannot be absent from school for more than 10 days in an academic year without the approval of the local school board. School officials must intervene in cases where a student has three straight unexcused absences, or a total of five.

C. Provide More Effective Use of Classroom Time

1. The school day for elementary students will be six hours, including lunch; for secondary students, it will be no fewer than six hours, including lunch. Class interruptions will be limited only to emergencies.
2. All 5-year-olds will be required to attend kindergarten (either public, private or church-related). However, this mandatory attendance may be waived upon written request by parent or guardian.
3. The school year for students will consist of 180 days of instruction. Saturday sessions will only be allowed for remedial instruction for students in grades 7 through 12.

D. Provide Programs of Excellence for Talented Students

1. Each district must provide Advanced Placement Courses to ensure that talented high school students remain academically challenged and to provide them a "head start" on their college careers. These courses will count toward credit in the state's public colleges and universities if the student meets appropriate requirements.
2. By August 1987, programs for gifted and talented students must be available in both elementary and secondary public schools.

E. Provide More Relevant Vocational Training Programs

1. In the future, vocational courses must more directly prepare students for meaningful employment in the emerging economy, or facilitate their acceptance into an appropriate college.
2. In purchasing vocational education equipment, the highest priority will be placed on job-preparatory courses related to the high-tech trades, high labor demand, small business management and new and emerging trades.
3. Beginning in 1987-88, 50 percent of all graduates available for placement must — during the previous three years — have been placed in that vocational area for which their

training prepared them. However, the State Board of Education may waive this requirement in those areas where the district's programs respond specifically to the new and changing employment needs of local businesses and industries.

F. Provide Programs of Excellence for Handicapped Students

1. Comprehensive services for emotionally handicapped and profoundly handicapped students will be made available at all levels.



The basic skills are the building blocks of education. For if a student is to be competitive in the classroom and, down the road, in the workplace, he or she must demonstrate a full range of academic proficiency. That kind of proficiency, by necessity, can only originate with a thorough understanding of the basic skills.

The New Approach recognizes the central role that basic skills play in the learning process at all levels; that recognition is illustrated in any number of ways. An exit examination assures that we do not send graduating seniors into a world they are ill-equipped to handle. The establishment of tough, specific promotion policies makes it very clear that we will no longer tolerate "social promotion," which is perhaps the cruelest intellectual evil that can be perpetrated against the student. In providing the means to identify preschool children who have significant developmental deficiencies — and to correct those deficiencies — the New Approach serves notice that we will no longer wait until the problem surfaces before attacking it.



ACTION INITIATIVE TWO:

*To Strengthen the Teaching and Testing
Of the Basic Skills*

A. Requires Passing an Exit Exam for Graduation

1. All students will be given a basic skills exit examination in the 10th grade. Students are allowed to retake the exam twice in the 11th grade and once in the 12th. Any student who fails will be enrolled in a remedial instruction program. If a student leaves the school system without passing the exam, he will not receive a diploma, but a certificate.

B. Enactment of a Promotion Policy

1. Local school boards will enact a promotion policy based on academic achievement. These tougher guidelines will eradicate the practice of "social promotion" and ensure that students have mastered the subject-matter demands of a given grade before advancing. In grades 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8, scores on a Basic Skills exam will make up 25 percent of the students' assessment in reading and math; the remaining criteria will be specified by the State Board of Education. Any student who fails to meet these criteria can be assigned to a remedial program; however, to be promoted, these students must satisfy the minimum promotion standards set by the State Board.

C. Improve the Basic Skills in All Grades

1. Four-year-olds with developmental deficiencies may attend half-day child development programs. The programs will involve parents and appropriate agencies and will provide a vehicle to better prepare children for public school.

2. Any student who does not meet the state's minimum basic skills requirements will be provided additional special instruction in reading, writing and math. Initially, a greater level of resources will be targeted in grades 1-6 for children with serious deficiencies.

3. Because some students may require more instruction to bring their basic skills in line with the state's standards, the Board of Education has the authority to approve adjustments in the current time requirements of certain courses.

4. All secondary schools will be required to maintain a student-teacher ratio of no more than 30:1 in math and the language arts.

5. Recognizing that science and technology will play a significant role in shaping the world of the future, all of South Carolina's basic skills testing and instructional programs will include science concepts.



During the past few years, teaching as a profession seems to have become less and less attractive. Too often, the best minds of our generation are being lost to higher-prestige, higher-paying professions. In the process, the educational system — and its products — have paid the ultimate price. This situation can no longer be tolerated.

The New Approach seeks to elevate teaching to the status it deserves. By providing programs to locate, identify and assist bright young prospects, it seeks to begin building a foundation of academic excellence in the classroom. By raising pay to competitive levels, it aims not only to attract good people into teaching, but to keep them and to encourage their own educational and professional growth. And by providing incentives, it invites teachers to take the challenge of education a step further by developing unique, innovative and effective approaches to learning.

However, these benefits are not offered in a vacuum. They are inextricably linked to performance. In the New Approach, there is no room for mediocrity in the teaching profession. We are setting new, tough standards for teachers in order to ensure their accountability. In doing so, we are seeking a guarantee of professionalism whose impact will be felt for decades to come.



ACTION INITIATIVE THREE:

*Elevate the Teaching Profession
By Strengthening Teacher Training,
Evaluation and Compensation*

A. Increase the Number of Highly Qualified Persons Going Into Teaching Profession

1. As a matter of public policy, colleges and universities, secondary schools and the Governor's Schools will promote teaching as a career and must provide interested students with tutoring opportunities to complement any instruction in education.

2. An incentive loan program will be offered at South Carolina colleges and universities to attract capable individuals to specialize in teaching areas of "critical need." These loans will be forgiven at a rate of 20 percent for each year if a recipient teaches in a "critical need" area such as science, math or rural geographical areas.

3. The State may grant provisional teaching certificates to persons who have earned a bachelor's degree in an area of "critical need" but who have not met the regular certification requirements. However, these people must illustrate expertise in the subject matter, must demonstrate competency in teaching and must make satisfactory progress toward completing a teaching certification program within three years.

B. Raise Teacher Salaries In Order To Attract and Hold Qualified Persons in Teaching

1. The average teacher salary in the state will be increased and maintained to equal the projected average for the Southeast. Beginning in 1986, no teacher will get a pay raise unless he or she has a) a valid A or professional certificate; b) met a minimum score on the area teaching exam, or c) met a minimum score on the Basic Skills Exam. Also beginning in 1986, a teacher not meeting those criteria will not be allowed to continue employment as a teacher with the district.

2. A teacher incentive program will be developed according to the following schedule:

(a) During the 1984-85 school year, the State Board will develop models for the program. The following year, these models will be tested in nine school districts selected by the Board and the select committee. Statewide implementation of one model will begin in 1986-87.

(b) The model will be chosen by the State Department of Education and the State Board, with the assistance of a special education and business advisory committee.

(c) All models will at minimum include: 1) an evaluation of teaching as it relates to improved student learning and development; 2) an evaluation team that consists of principals and teachers; 3) evidence of self-improvement by the teacher through advanced training; 4) meaningful participation of teachers in the development of the plan.

C. Improve the Training of Prospective Teachers and Persons Currently in Teaching

1. Beginning with the 1984 school year, the State Board will upgrade the standards for approval of teacher education programs.

2. Additionally, selected South Carolina colleges will develop centers that are designed to promote excellence in teaching.

3. Training for prospective teachers must include field experiences and effective techniques relevant to practical classroom situations. Effective teaching information will also be included in an "in-service" training program for all teachers.

4. Beginning in 1985, classroom teachers, principals and supervisors will be eligible for tuition reimbursement every two years for completion of a three-credit-hour course and working a year in their field of specialization.

D. Maximize the Utilization of Teaching Time and Talent

1. The teacher work year will be increased to 190 days to guarantee that teachers have proper planning and preparation time.

2. The state will develop a computer program system to reduce the burden of paperwork on classroom teachers.

3. Teachers will be offered competitive grants to develop and implement new and creative classroom techniques.

4. An objective evaluation system for teachers will be developed, and formal evaluations will take place at least every three years.



The efficiency and overall excellence of our public schools is, to a large degree, directly related to the administrators at both the school and the district levels. It is therefore essential that the processes by which these administrators are screened, selected and evaluated reflect the importance of their impact upon the system.

Under the New Approach, South Carolina is assured of finding and employing individuals of the highest intellectual, managerial and administrative capability. The mechanisms established here are designed to locate individuals of commitment and quality. Furthermore, the New Approach affords them the opportunity to maintain and enhance their skills.

However, just as the New Approach demands accountability from students and teachers, it does likewise for administrators. It holds principals responsible for the success and achievement of their students and schools, and administrators responsible for the performance of their districts. Moreover, it provides incentives to ensure that strong, creative and effective leaders have the opportunity to surface and excel.



ACTION INITIATIVE FOUR:

Improve Leadership, Management and Fiscal Efficiency At All Levels

A. Recruit the Most Able Candidates to Become Principals and Administrators

1. Prospective candidates for school principal will be assessed by the State Department of Education for instructional leadership and management capabilities. This assessment will be sent to the local board before any appointment is made.

2. Admission requirements will be increased for graduate programs in school administration at all state-supported colleges and universities offering such degrees.

B. Improve the Training and Evaluation of Prospective and Current School Administrators

1. Every two years, school administrators will be required to take part in approved seminars on improving administrative skills and instructional leadership.

2. School districts will evaluate administrators annually. Any administrator designated "unsatisfactory" must complete a "retraining program" conducted by the S.C. Leadership Academy.

3. An incentive program to reward principals will be developed as follows:

(a) The State Board will develop the program in the 1984-85 school year, test it in nine school districts the next year and implement one method statewide in 1987.

(b) Only those principals who meet or exceed all eligibility standards can receive funds.

(c) The incentive programs will include 1) evaluation of leadership instruction and student learning; 2) an evaluation team consisting of administrators, teachers and other principals; 3) evidence of self-improvement by the principal through advanced training; 4) active participation by principals in the development of the plan; 5) working with student teachers.



Schools must be challenged to do their very best. As we set higher educational standards, the school as a whole must strive to meet those standards and, whenever possible, exceed them. In order to accomplish this, we will provide these academic institutions with incentives whose ultimate aim is to improve the intellectual standing of the students. Schools and school districts whose level of performance stands apart from those of its peers should be recognized. Under the New Approach, they will be.

But incentives alone are not enough. The New Approach fosters a progressive attitude toward education. It encourages new and unique instructional programs. It emphasizes setting and meeting stated school objectives — and then reviewing the overall intent and success of this program — thus assuring accountability while at the same time providing a valuable mechanism for intelligent, forward-thinking management and school efficiency. Furthermore, the New Approach calls for an annual assessment and accountability measures to be applied at every level of the educational system — classroom, school, school district and the state system of public education.



ACTION INITIATIVE FIVE:

*Guarantee Results By Implementing
Strict Quality Controls and Rewarding Productivity*

A. Evaluate and Reward Schools and School Districts Based on Measurable Performance and Progress

1. The State Board will establish an incentive grant fund to reward schools and school districts for exceptional performance. Schools and districts will compete against their past performances for bonuses, and will be assessed in areas such as:

- (a) achievement gains over the previous year;
- (b) improved student attendance;
- (c) improved teacher attendance;
- (d) improved student attitudes toward learning;
- (e) improved parent participation.

2. A state competitive grants program will provide funds to districts for exemplary and innovative programs of improved instruction.

B. Focus the Planning of Schools and School Districts on Instructional Improvement, and Effective Use of Resources

1. Each school will have a School Improvement Council composed of parents, teachers and students that will prepare an annual school improvement report. The report will focus attention on the practices and factors affecting school improvement.

C. Monitor Annually the Implementation of this Educational Improvement Act

1. A Select Legislative Committee will be established to monitor the implementation of the Education Improvement Act.

2. The two blue ribbon committees appointed by the Governor will reconvene at least once a year to review the implementation of the program, and recommend any improvements they believe are necessary to ensure its continued success.

3. A Public Accountability Division will be created in the Department of Education whose sole function will be to monitor the implementation of the program.

4. In districts where the quality of education is seriously impaired, the state superintendent — with the approval of the State Board — will have the authority to intervene and make recommendations for corrective action within six months. If corrective action is not implemented, the state superintendent may: 1) declare a state of emergency and order that funds for all education improvement programs be frozen; 2) provide advice and technical assistance to the local district; 3) recommend to the Governor that the office of local district superintendent be declared vacant.



One of the most effective ways to improve the educational environment in general is to expand its base of support within the community. By doing so, we are not simply recruiting new allies for education. We are also utilizing, at no cost, a vast source of talent whose impact is felt far beyond the school walls. For education does not begin and end within the school walls. It is a cooperative venture. The New Approach recognizes this, and establishes firm objectives for increasing the involvement of parents, community leaders and businessmen in the learning process.

An open line of communication between parent and teacher is crucial to a student's educational development. Parent-teacher relationships can be critical to the identification and prevention of potential problems, and can have a decidedly positive impact on student attitudes toward learning.

At the same time, community involvement in the school leads to community interest in the schools. Thus, there is a greater awareness of school and student accomplishments, and an understanding of the issues and difficulties facing education.

The formulation of a sound relationship with the business community holds any number of advantages. By inviting business to join in a constructive relationship with the school system, the New Approach is recognizing the unmistakable linkage between quality of education and quality of life.



ACTION INITIATIVE SIX:

*Create More Effective Partnerships
Between the Schools and Parents, the Community and Business*

A. Strengthen the Involvement of Parents in Their Children's Education

1. The State Board will promote the involvement of parents in children's education by encouraging regular parent-teacher conferences, involving more teachers and parents with the school improvement councils and making parenting classes available in every community.

B. Increase the Participation of Business and Industry in the Public Schools

1. The State Board, acting through the State Department of Education, will adopt policies and procedures to encourage school personnel and business organizations to become active partners in strengthening the public schools.

2. All schools and businesses will be encouraged to participate in "adopt-a-school" programs.

3. Statewide businesses and their organizations will be encouraged to create a Public Education Foundation to finance exemplary and innovative projects that support improvement in public schools.

C. Broaden Community Involvement in the Public Schools

1. The State Board of Education will encourage the expansion of school volunteer programs.

2. The State Board will initiate an awards program that recognizes businesses and industries, civic organizations, school improvement councils and individuals contributing most significantly to public education.



The effect of environment on productivity has been shown repeatedly, for a sound working environment is critical to achievement and success. That connection, while proved in study after study of the workplace, is equally as strong in education. Therefore, the need for newer, or at least renovated, school buildings could not be clearer.

Many of our educational structures are showing their age. They are run-down and substandard. Some are not accessible to handicapped students, or are inappropriately designed for the needs of today's students. Many are not energy-efficient.

Unfortunately, many districts do not have the economic base to undertake the type of construction that is necessary to reverse this trend. They simply cannot raise the money. As a result, students — through no fault of their own — are being taught in facilities that do not promote the kind of environment that is critical to the success of the learning process.

The New Approach, in providing funds for school construction and renovation of academic and academic-related facilities, is seeking to enhance the learning experience by enhancing the learning atmosphere. The intention is obvious: if we are going to demand the maximum of students, teachers and administrators — and schools and districts as a whole — we must provide them with the facilities to do the job.



ACTION INITIATIVE SEVEN:

*Provide School Buildings
Conducive To Improve Student Learning*

A • Perform Pressing Repairs, Renovations and Construction on School Buildings

1. The state will provide additional funds to districts on a per-pupil basis to renovate and build school facilities.

(a) School districts that have begun major capital improvement programs in the past five years or issued bonds for the purpose must use 50 percent of their appropriation to reduce millage required to pay off the debt.

(b) Furthermore, a school district must use these funds to pay any debt resulting from capital improvement programs.